

# “FOOTBALL FOR LIFE”: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT MODEL IN ONE MINOR FOOTBALL CLUB

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Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is a framework for elite athlete development and lifetime participation in sport and recreation instituted in 2004 by the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) movement. CS4L represents a paradigm shift in the way sport is designed and delivered in Canada, and is intended to guide action that promotes athlete excellence and an active lifestyle. This paradigm shift depends on the successful implementation of LTAD at all levels of the Canadian sport system. Briefly, the LTAD promotes physical literacy, elite performance and lifelong participation in sport through seven stages of individual sport development according to physical growth and emotional maturation, rather than chronological age (CS4L, 2005).

National sport organizations have been expected to develop sport-specific LTAD models, with federal government funding tied to that (Charest, 2012). Those documents are then passed to their provincial/territorial counterparts for further dissemination and implementation at the community sport level (CS4L, 2010). Thus, it is important to understand factors that influence its successful realization there. Governments are often unaware of the onus placed on those ultimately responsible for putting policy into practice, but community sport organizations need to be considered active agents in the policy implementation process (Harris, Mori, & Collins, 2009). The purpose of this study is to understand the conditions and attitudes associated with the implementation of Football Canada’s LTAD model in one minor football club.

Football for Life is the guiding document of Football Canada with regard to instituting the principles of the LTAD in this sport. Football for Life outlines training guidelines specific to developmental levels and modified competition parameters such as rules, age classifications, and season length. Football for Life is only beginning to make its way to the community level; thus, it provides a useful context to examine attitudes and conditions for LTAD implementation in advance of or at the early stages of that process.

Government policies are implemented by organizations, so it is useful to conceptualize implementation as an organizational problem (Montjoy & O’Toole, 1979). Any gap between policymakers’ intentions and what happens in practice when a policy like the LTAD is implemented is dependent on community sport organizations having the capacity and motivation to respond (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). The study is guided by a policy implementation framework (Skille, 2008; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975) which contends that success is a function of (1) the nature of the policy itself and associated resources, (2) economic and political conditions within the organization that dictate its readiness for change, and (3) the ability and willingness of the individuals charged with its implementation. The framework is particularly useful for the examination of policy implementation at the community sport club level as it focuses on the club itself and those charged with adopting the policy whereas other frameworks tend to favor the central level policymakers in the analysis of implementation (cf. Donaldson, Leggett, & Finch, 2011; Harris et al., 2009).

A case study methodology (Stake, 2005) is used for this investigation of the conditions and attitudes associated with implementation of the Football for Life LTAD model. Data collection is currently underway and involves semi-structured interviews with three club administrators and five head coaches directly involved in the governance and delivery of the club’s programs. The interview guide is designed to gather insight into the factors outlined in the policy implementation framework (Skille, 2008; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975), and to understand the nature and anticipated efficacy of any strategies intended to promote its adoption in the club.

The findings will highlight the conditions and attitudes associated with the implementation of the LTAD in Canadian sport as identified through this case study. The relative impact of the policy itself, organizational readiness and individual willingness on the successful adoption of the LTAD will be indicated. Recommendations for practice with regard to successful policy implementation, as well as for further research will also be presented. This study extends the limited research to date on the management of policy implementation, while promoting the view that policy implementation is ultimately an organizational issue.

## References

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